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Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204

MOSES MAIMONIDES'

EPISTLE TO YEMEN

THE ARABIC ORIGINAL AND THE THREE HEBREW VERSIONS

EDITED FROM MANUSCRIPTS
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

by

ABRAHAM S. HALKIN

and

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

by

BOAZ COHEN

NEW YORK
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PREFACE

In 1910 the late Professor Israel Friedlaender announced his intention to publish the Arabic original of the EPISTLE TO YEMEN from a manuscript recently acquired by the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. Unfortunately his untimely death at the hand of Ukrainian assassins interrupted his undertaking. After a long interval the task was entrusted to me. Meanwhile additional manuscript material became available of both the Arabic and the two Hebrew versions which Professor Friedlaender had planned to include in his edition. The work consequently required thorough revision. The Arabic text in particular was recast since the new material proved to be much closer to the Hebrew versions than the earlier manuscript. In addition, the Hebrew translation of Naḥūm ha-Ma'arābī, published many times, is also appearing in a critical edition.

Professor Friedlaender also prepared an English translation, but it could not be located. In its place the English rendering by Professor Boaz Cohen is given. Originally made for the octocentennial of Maimonides' birth, it was carefully revised for its present publication.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Alexander Marx, Director of Libraries at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and to his able staff. They assisted me readily and cheerfully, and put the riches of the Libraries at my disposal. I thank Professor Saul Lieberman, who read the manuscript, and my other colleagues who favored me with their learning and counsel. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my wife for her understanding and encouragement. Bearing no responsibility for faults which may be found with this work, they share in what merit it may possess.

A. S. H.

January, 1952.

INTRODUCTION

The EPISTLE TO YEMEN, probably a compilation of several shorter responsa, was written by Maimonides about 1172 in reply to an inquiry (or inquiries) by Jacob ben Netan'el al-Fayyūmi, the then head of the Jewish community in Yemen. The exchange of letters was occasioned by a crisis through which the Jews of that country were passing. A forced conversion to Islam, inaugurated about 1165 by ʿAbd-al-Nabī ibn Mahdi, who had gained control over most of Yemen, threw the Jews into panic. The campaign conducted by a recent convert to win them to his new faith, coupled with a Messianic movement started by a native of the country who claimed he was the Messiah, increased the confusion within the Jewish community. Rabbi Jacob evidently sought guidance and encouragement, and Maimonides attempted to supply both.

In the course of his reply Maimonides deals at length with several subjects which were live issues in his time. In the Hebrew introduction these topics are analyzed in detail. Here only a brief summary will be presented.

Religious polemics. In his desire to refute the arguments of the apostate Jew, Maimonides devotes considerable space to demolishing his propaganda. Muslim polemics against Judaism could be subsumed under three headings: 1) By His dispensation revealed to Muḥammad, God abrogated the Law of Moses, just as He had previously abrogated regulations within the Bible; 2) The Jews have forged and falsified the contents of their Law; originally many predictions of Muḥammad's coming were found in it; 3) References to the prophetic mission of Muḥammad in the Jewish Scriptures are nevertheless still available. Earlier Jewish scholars, both Rabbanite and Karaite, met these charges with logical as well as historical arguments. Maimonides rests his case squarely on evidence to be gleaned from the Law. He disposes of the first Muslim contention with the apodictic assertion that we have it from Moses himself that no other Law will be revealed. He counters the charge of forgery by his explanation that the Muslims resorted to it only after the discovery that nothing in the Jewish Law even suggested the coming of Muḥammad. Actually the Muslims themselves realize that this charge has no basis in fact, and hurl it only because of their disappointment with the Masoretic text. However, this text is incontrovertibly authentic since the several versions of the Bible, all earlier than their Prophet, agree with it down to details. The last argument is refuted by more elaborate treatment. He demonstrates that, taken in their context, Genesis 17.20, Deuteronomy 33.2 and 18.15 cannot possibly refer to the Muslim prophet, and that any attempt to read such meaning into these passages is sheer folly. In addition, Maimonides defines the standards for determining the prophethood of any claimant. Although in this issue as elsewhere his predecessors dealt with this question, he develops it his own way. He makes it clear that credibility depends not on the nationality of the candidate but on the content of his message. Falling back on the unassailable assertion by Moses that our Torah is eternal, he rules that unless a man comes to confirm the Mosaic dispensation he does not deserve to have his claim checked. Moreover, this basic requirement is not disregarded even if the pretender displays dexterity in performing miracles; on the contrary, they are not heeded in view of his denial of the Law of Moses. Only after his avowal of faith in Moses and his Law is he to be asked for a sign. This is not necessarily a miracle and may consist of the ability to predict an event. Once these conditions are met, credence of the prophet becomes an obligation, although it is theoretically possible that he is an impostor. We cannot tell whether Maimonides replied to points raised by the apostate or took up some items in the general discussion. For this reason we do not know whether his defense of the Oral Law was directed against the attacks by the convert or whether they were written to strengthen the faith of the Yemenites against well-known criticisms of the Talmud by Muslims who may have acquired their stock arguments from the Karaites.

Maimonides' attitude to astrology. The Jewish position on astrology is not too clearly defined. Notwithstanding the Biblical prohibition, enough evidence can be found in Rabbinic literature in favor of the belief in star-gazing. Such statements are in reality a reflection of the generally wide acceptance of this "science" in the ancient world. At the same time the Talmudic authorities never hesitate in their insistence on man's freedom of will, despite the logical contradiction. In the Middle Ages, in an environment which treated astrology as a respectable pursuit, the tendency persisted to recognize the influence of the movements of the heavenly bodies on the fate of this world. But since they were aware of the Biblical injunction against the application of

its conclusions, adepts employed various means to explain and justify their position, such as maintaining that only the practice and not the acceptance of astrology is prohibited. Maimonides, however, remains a consistent opponent of it in all his works. In his legal writings as well as in his letters he points out its incredibility and weakness. Replying to questions on the subject addressed to him by the communities of Southern France, he condemns astrology as sheer stupidity and as a useless pursuit. He goes so far as to declare that occupation with it instead of with military practice accounts for the fall of Jerusalem in the war with the Romans. The allegedly approving utterances of Rabbis and sages will not sway him whatever the explanation of their statements may be. In our text he similarly expresses his thoroughgoing disdain of this occult "science" by demonstrating that its predictions have always been wrong and its interpretation of events unwarranted. Both on rational and on traditional grounds it is an error, and it further results in minimizing the complete rule and justice of God's providence in the world.

Messianism. Although Maimonides counted the belief in the advent of the Messiah as an article of faith and restated it in his legal code, his view of the Messianic age is rather sober. He regards it merely as a period of peace and of the ingathering of the exiles for the higher aim of the study of Torah and preparation for life in the world to come. He discounts the likelihood of supernatural events and, basing himself on the opinion of a Talmudic sage, emphasizes the essentially natural character of the transition. But in the Epistle to Yemen his entire attitude changes. Perhaps as a result of the difficult condition of the Jews or of the critical situation in Yemen, he manifests greater excitement, warmth, and typically Jewish piety. The abstract dogma becomes a concrete hope. He sees a prelude to the Messianic age in the misery which the Jews of his day are suffering. He looks to the renewal of prophecy in the near future, and even confirms the prophetic character of a man of his time who was nevertheless mistaken in his prediction of the imminent coming of the Messiah. He glorifies the figure of the Redeemer, describes in detail the greatness of his performance and the amazement which it will create in the world. However, expectant as he is, he is equally anxious to dispel his correspondent's illusion that this or any other upstart can rise and claim Messiahship. Maimonides thus seeks to achieve two goals in his treatment of this subject. He attempts to make it clear that this pretender cannot possibly be the Messiah and at the same time to keep up the courage of the Jews by stressing the nearness of the redemption. He urges hopeful patience, illustrating by several examples from Jewish history the tragic results of haste and of irrational credulity in the claims of any pretender.

In sum, a study of the letter indicates that although Maimonides necessarily wrote in a popular vein, he nevertheless touches on some fundamental problems of his age and solves them in a manner and tone worthy of his character and his intellect.

THIS IS THE TEXT OF THE EPISTLE OF R. MOSES b. MAIMON, RABBI AND DAYYAN OF BLESSED MEMORY, IN REPLY TO A LETTER FROM R. JACOB OF YEMEN

To the honored, great, and holy Master and Teacher, Jacob, wise and genial, dear and revered sage, son of the honored, great, and holy Master and Teacher, Nathaniel Fayyumi, distinguished Prince of Yemen, president of its congregations, leader of its communities, may the spirit of God rest upon him, and upon all his associates and upon all the scholars of the communities of Yemen. May the Lord keep and protect them. From a loving friend who never saw him but knows him only by reputation, Moses b. Maimon b. Joseph b. Isaac b. Obadiah of blessed memory.

Just as plants bear testimony to the existence of real roots, and waters are evidence for the excellence of springs, so has a firm shoot developed from the roots of truth and righteousness, and a huge river has gushed forth from the spring of mercy in the land of Yemen, to water therewith all gardens and to make the flowers blossom. It flows gently on to satisfy the needs of the weary and thirsty in the arid places; wayfarers and folks from the isles of the sea satisfy their needs with it. Consequently it was proclaimed from Spain to Babylonia, from one end of heaven to the other: "Ho, ye every one that thirsteth come for water." (Isaiah 55:1) Men of business and traffic unanimously declare to all inquirers that they have found in the land of Yemen a beautiful and delightful plantation, and a rich pasture with faithful shepherds wherein every lean one shall wax fat. They strengthen the indigent with bread and greet the opulent hospitably and generously; even the Sabaen caravans look forward to their generosity. Their hands are stretched out to every passer-by, and their homes are wide open to every traveler. With them all find tranquility; sorrow and sighing flee. They continually study the Law of Moses, walk in the way of R. Ashi, pursue justice, repair the breach, uphold the principles of the Torah, bring back the stray people of God by encouraging words, observe the religious ceremonies punctiliously in their communities; "there is no breach, no going forth, and no outcry in the broad places (Psalms 144:14)."

Blessed be the Lord that He has suffered Jews to remain who observe the Torah and obey its injunctions in the most distant peninsulas, as we were graciously assured through Isaiah, His servant, for it is you the people of Yemen he was alluding to when he prophesied "From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs." (24:16).

When we departed from the West to behold the pleasantness of the Lord and to visit His holy place, we learnt that your father has gone to his eternal rest. May God bestow His Justice and Goodness upon him. May he enter unto peace and rest upon his bed. May He send him Angels of Mercy. May he rest and rise up for his reward at the end of days.

This is the token, dearly beloved friend, that God was pleased with your father's deeds, and that He will compensate him doubly, and grant him peace. For you, his son, have risen in his stead to promote religion and observance, to further justice and righteousness, to obey His precepts and laws, and to abide by His covenant. May the Lord thy God be with you as He was with your fathers. May He not forsake you, nor abandon you. May He give you broad understanding to judge His people. May His words never depart from your mouth nor the mouth of your seed as it was written (Isaiah 59:10). May you succeed your father as leader of his people, and God grant that your fame be greater than his.

When your communication arrived in Egypt, dearly beloved friend, our ears were pleased at hearing it read, and the mere view of it was a feast to the eyes. It revealed that you were one of the ministers of the Lord who dwell in His fane, and are pitched at His standard; that you pursue the study of the Torah, love its laws, and watch at its gates. May the Lord divulge unto you its secrets, and stock you abundantly with the knowledge of its treasures, make its crown your chief crown, place its necklace upon your neck, and may its words be a lamp unto your feet, and a light unto your path, and through them may you become celebrated. "When all the people of the land will see that the name of the Lord is upon you they shall fear you." (Deuteronomy 28:10).

You write in your letter, dear friend, of a report that some of our co-religionists in the diaspora, may the Lord keep and protect them, praise and extol me very highly and compare me to the illustrious Geonim. But they have spoken thus about me out of mere tenderness for me, and written about me out of pure

goodness. However, hearken to a word fitly spoken by me, and give no heed to the sayings of others. Verily, I am one of the humblest of scholars from Spain whose prestige was lowered in exile. Although I always study the ordinances of the Lord, I did not attain to the learning of my forebears, for evil days and hard times overtook us; we did not abide in tranquility. We labored and had no rest. How could we study the law when we were being exiled from city to city, and from country to country. I pursued the reapers in their paths and gathered ears of grain, both the rank and the full ones, as well as the withered and the thin ones. Only recently have I found a home. Were it not for the help of God, I would not have culled the store I did and from which I continually draw.

Furthermore you write in your letter that our friend and disciple, R. Solomon, a princely priest, and scholar of understanding, is profuse in praising me, and lavish in lauding me. But truth to say, he has indulged in hyperboles because of his affection for me, and has spoken extravagantly because of his tender feelings for me. May the Lord guard him, and may he be like a blossoming vineyard, and may he return to us hale and hearty. As for the other matters concerning which you have requested a reply, I deemed it best to respond in the Arabic tongue and idiom. For then all may read it with ease, men, women, and children, for it is important that the substance of our reply altogether be understood by every member of your community.

You write that the rebel leader in Yemen decreed compulsory apostasy for the Jews by forcing the Jewish inhabitants of all the places he had subdued to desert the Jewish religion just as the Berbers had compelled them to do in Maghreb. Verily, this news has broken our backs and has astounded and dumbfounded the whole of our community. And rightly so. For these are evil tidings, "and whosoever heareth of them, both his ears tingle (I Samuel 3:11)." Indeed our hearts are weakened, our minds are confused, and the powers of the body wasted because of the dire misfortunes which brought religious persecutions upon us from the two ends of the world, the East and the West, "so that the enemies were in the midst of Israel, some on this side, and some on that side." (Joshua 8:22). The prophet upon learning of such difficult and dreadful times prayed and interceded in our behalf, as we read, "Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech Thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small." (Amos 7:5). Indeed, this is a subject which no religious man dare take lightly, nor any one who believes in Moses put aside. There can be no doubt that these are the Messianic travails concerning which the sages invoked God that they be spared seeing and experiencing them. Similarly the prophets trembled when they envisioned them as we learn from the words of Isaiah, "My heart panteth, fearfulness affrighteth me, the twilight I have longed for hath been turned for me into trembling" (21:4). Note also the divine exclamation in the Torah expressing sympathy for those who will experience them, as we read, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!" (Numbers 24:23).

You write that the hearts of some people have turned away, uncertainty befalls them and their beliefs are weakened, while others have not lost faith nor have they become disquieted. Concerning this matter we have a divine premonition through Daniel who predicted that the prolonged stay of Israel in the Diaspora, and the continuous persecutions will cause many to drift away from our faith, to have misgivings, or to go astray, because they witnessed our feebleness, and noted the triumph of our adversaries and their dominion over us, while others would neither oscillate in their belief, nor be shaken in their convictions. This may be gathered from the verse, "Many shall purify themselves, make themselves white, and be refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand; but they that are wise shall understand." (Daniel 12:10). Further on he foretells that even men of understanding and intelligence who would have brooked milder misfortunes and remained firm in their belief in God and in His servant Moses, will yield to distrust and will err, when they are visited by sterner and harsher afflictions, while only a few will remain pure in faith as we read, "And some of them that are wise shall stumble." (Daniel 11:35).

And now, my co-religionists, it is essential for you all to give attention and consideration to that which I am going to point out to you. You should impress it upon the minds of your women and children, so that their faith which may be enfeebled and impaired may be strengthened, and that they be re-established in an unceasing belief. May the Lord deliver us and you from religious doubt!

Remember, that ours is the true and authentic Divine religion, revealed to us through Moses, the master of the former as well as the later prophets, by means of which God has distinguished us from the rest of mankind, as Scripture says, "Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them and He chose their seed after them, even you above all peoples" (Deuteronomy 10:15). This did not happen because of our merits, but rather as an act of Divine grace, and on account of our forefathers who were cognizant of God and

submitted to Him as we read, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people . . . but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers." (Deuteronomy 7:7). God has made us unique by His laws and precepts, and our pre-eminence is manifested in His rules and statutes, as Scripture says, in narrating God's mercies to us, "And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deuteronomy 4:8). Therefore all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us. They wanted to thwart God, but He cannot be thwarted. Ever since the time of Revelation, every despot or slave that has attained to power, be he violent or ignoble, has made it his first aim and his final purpose to destroy our law, and to vitiate our religion, by means of the sword, by violence, or by brute force, such as Amalek, Sisera, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, Hadrian, may their bones be ground to dust, and others like them. This is one of the two classes which attempt to foil the Divine will.

The second class consists of the most intelligent and educated among the nations, such as the Syrians, Persians, and Greeks. These also endeavor to demolish our law and to vitiate it by means of arguments which they invent, and by means of controversies which they institute. They seek to render the Law ineffectual and to wipe out every trace thereof by means of their polemical writings, just as the despots plan to do it with the sword. But neither the one nor the other shall succeed. We possess the divine assurance given to Isaiah concerning any tyrant that will wish to undermine our Law and to annihilate it by weapons of war, that the Lord will demolish them so that they will have no effect. This is only a metaphorical way of saying that his efforts will be of no avail, and that he will not accomplish his purpose. In like manner whenever a disputant shall attempt to demonstrate the falsity of our Law, the Lord will shatter his arguments and prove them absurd untenable and ineffective. This divine promise is contained in the following verse, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." (Isaiah 54:17).

Although the exponents of both methods persuade themselves that this is a structure which can be demolished, and they exert themselves to undermine its firmly established foundations, they only increase their pain and toil. The structure remains as firmly planted as ever, while the God of Truth mocks and derides them, because they endeavor, with their feeble intelligence, to achieve a goal that is beyond the powers of mortal man. The inspired writer describes their attempt and God's scorn of them in the following verses: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their words from us, He that sitteth in heaven laugheth, the Lord hath them in derision." (Psalms 2:3–4). Both of these parties have harassed and afflicted us incessantly throughout the epoch of our political independence, and partly during the period of our dispersion.

After that there arose a new sect which combined the two methods, namely, conquest and controversy, into one, because it believed that this procedure would be more effective in wiping out every trace of the Jewish nation and religion. It, therefore, resolved to lay claim to prophecy and to found a new faith, contrary to our Divine religion, and to contend that it was equally God-given. Thereby it hoped to raise doubts and to create confusion, since one is opposed to the other and both supposedly emanate from a Divine source, which would lead to the destruction of both religions. For such is the remarkable plan contrived by a man who is envious and querulous. He will strive to kill his enemy and to save his own life, but when he finds it impossible to attain his objective, he will devise a scheme whereby they both will be slain.

The first one to have adopted this plan was Jesus the Nazarene, may his bones be ground to dust. He was a Jew because his mother was a Jewess although his father was a Gentile. For in accordance with the principles of our law, a child born of a Jewess and a Gentile, or of a Jewess and a slave, is legitimate. (Yebamot 45a). Jesus is only figuratively termed an illegitimate child. He impelled people to believe that he was a prophet sent by God to clarify perplexities in the Torah, and that he was the Messiah that was predicted by each and every seer. He interpreted the Torah and its precepts in such a fashion as to lead to their total annulment, to the abolition of all its commandments and to the violation of its prohibitions. The sages, of blessed memory, having become aware of his plans before his reputation spread among our people, meted out fitting punishment to him.[1]

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[1] As in his other writings, Maimonides accepts here the fundamentals of both the Christian and Muslim tradition in point of historical fact, but argues on logical and scriptural grounds against the acceptance of Jesus and Mohammed as true prophets.

Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavor to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretenses to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah, as it is written, "Also the children of the impudent among thy people shall make bold to claim prophecy, but they shall fall." (Daniel 11:14).

Quite some time after, a religion[2] appeared the origin of which is traced to him by the descendants of Esau, albeit it was not the intention of this person to establish a new faith. For he was innocuous to Israel as neither individual nor groups were unsettled in their beliefs because of him, since his inconsistencies were so transparent to every one. Finally he was overpowered and put a stop to by us when he fell into our hands, and his fate is well known.

After him arose the Madman who emulated his precursor since he paved the way for him. But he added the further objective of procuring rule and submission, and he invented his well known religion. All of these men purposed to place their teachings on the same level with our divine religion. But only a simpleton who lacks knowledge of both would liken divine institutions to human practices. Our religion differs as much from other religions for which there are alleged resemblances as a living man endowed with the faculty of reason is unlike a statue which is ever so well carved out of marble, wood, bronze or silver. When a person ignorant of divine wisdom or of God's works sees the statue that superficially resembles a man in its contours, form, features, and color, he believes that the structure of the parts of a statue is like the constitution of a man, because he is deficient in understanding concerning the inner organization of both. But the informed person who knows the interior of both, is cognizant of the fact that the internal structure of the statue betrays no skillful workmanship at all, whereas the inward parts of man are truly marvellously made, a testimony to the wisdom of the Creator, such as the prolongation of the nerves in the muscles and their ramifications, the branching out of the sinews and their intersections and the network of their ligaments and their manner of growth, the articulations of the bones and the joints, the pulsating and non-pulsating blood vessels and their ramifications, the setting of the limbs into one another, the uncovered and covered parts, every one of these in proportion, in form and proper place.

Likewise a person ignorant of the secret meaning of Scripture and the deeper significance of the Law, would be led to believe that our religion has something in common with another if he makes a comparison between the two. For he will note that in the Torah there are prohibitions and commandments, just as in other religions there are permitted and interdicted acts. Both contain a system of religious observances, positive and negative precepts, sanctioned by reward and punishment.

If he could only fathom the inner intent of the law, then he would realize that the essence of the true divine religion lies in the deeper meaning of its positive and negative precepts, every one of which will aid man in his striving after perfection, and remove every impediment to the attainment of excellence. These commands will enable the throng and the élite to acquire moral and intellectual qualities, each according to his ability. Thus the godly community becomes pre-eminent, reaching a two-fold perfection. By the first perfection I mean, man's spending his life in this world under the most agreeable and congenial conditions. The second perfection would constitute the achievement of intellectual objectives, each in accordance with his native powers.

The tenets of the other religions which resemble those of Scripture have no deeper meaning, but are superficial imitations, copied from and patterned after it. They modelled their religions upon ours in order to glorify themselves, and indulge the fancy that they are similar to so and so. However, their counterfeiting is an open secret to the learned. Consequently they became objects of derision and ridicule just as one laughs and smiles at an ape when it imitates the actions of men.

This event was predicted in the divinely inspired prophecy of Daniel, according to which, in some future time a person would appear with a religion similar to the true one, with a book of Scriptures and oral communications, who will arrogantly pretend that God had vouchsafed him a revelation, and that he held converse with Him, besides making other extravagant claims. Thus Daniel in his description of the rise of the Arabic kingdom after the fall of the Roman Empire, alluded to the appearance of the Madman and his victories over the Roman, Persian, and Byzantine Empires in the vision concerning a horn which grew, became long and strong. This is clearly indicated in a verse that can be understood by the masses as well as

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[2] An allusion to the religion of Paul and the apostles whom Maimonides correctly understood to be the real founders of Christianity.

by the select few. Since this interpretation is borne out by the facts of history, no other meaning can be given to the following verse: "I considered the horns, and, behold, there came among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots; and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things." (Daniel 7:8).

Now consider how remarkably apt the symbolism is. Daniel says that he saw a small horn that was going up. When it became longer, even marvellously longer, it cast down before it three horns and behold in the side of the horn there were two eyes similar to the two eyes of man, and a mouth speaking wanton words. This obviously alludes to the person who will found a new religion similar to the divine law, and make claims to a revelation of a Scripture, and to prophecy. He will furthermore endeavor to alter and abolish the Law, as it is said, "and he shall seek to change the seasons and the law." (Daniel 7:25).

Daniel was divinely informed that He would destroy this person notwithstanding his greatness and his long endurance together with the remaining adherents of his predecessors. For the three parties that warred against us will ultimately perish, i. e., the one that sought to overpower us with the sword, the second which strove to conquer us by arguments, as well the third that founded a religion similar to ours.

Though they shall appear to be triumphant for a while, and be in the ascendancy for a longer or shorter period of time, they shall not last nor endure. We have a divine assurance from time immemorial that whenever a decree of apostasy is passed against us, God will ultimately terminate it. When King David inspired by the Holy Spirit and speaking in the name of the community reflected, how many peoples ruled over Israel in the past, and how many trials and tribulations they had undergone from the beginning of their history, and nevertheless were not exterminated, he was moved to exclaim, "Much have they afflicted me from my youth up; but they have not prevailed against me." (Psalms 129:2).

My brethren, you all know that in the time of Nebuchadnezzar the Wicked, the Jews were compelled to worship idols and none was spared save Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Ultimately God destroyed Nebuchadnezzar, and put an end to his laws, and the religion of Truth came back to its own.

Similarly during the Second Commonwealth when the wicked Greek rulers gained control of Palestine, they instituted severe persecutions against Israel in order to abolish the Torah. The Jews were compelled to profane the Sabbath, and were forbidden to observe the rite of circumcision. Every Jew was forced to write on his garment the words "we have no portion in the Lord God of Israel, and also to engrave this sentence on the horns of his ox and then plough with it."[3] This state of affairs lasted about fifty-two years. Finally, God brought to an end simultaneously their empire and their laws.

The sages, of blessed memory, frequently allude to persecutions in the following manner: "once the wicked government passed the following decree of persecution," or, "they decreed so and so." After a while God would make the decree null and void by destroying the power which issued it. It was this observation that led the rabbis of blessed memory to affirm that persecutions are of short duration. (Ketubot 3b).

The divine assurance was given to Jacob our father, that his descendants would survive the people who degraded and discomfited them as it is written: "And thy seed shall be like the dust of the earth." (Genesis 28:14). That is to say, although his offspring will be abased like dust that is trodden under foot, they will ultimately emerge triumphant and victorious, and as the simile implies, just as the dust settles finally upon him who tramples upon it, and remains after him, so shall Israel outlive its persecutors.

The prophet Isaiah has long ago predicted that various peoples will succeed in vanquishing Israel and lording over them for some time. But that ultimately God will come to Israel's assistance and will put a stop to their woes and affliction as is suggested in the following verse:

> "A grievous vision is declared unto me; the treacherous one will deal treacherously, and the spoiler will spoil; Go up O Elam, besiege O Media! but ultimately the sighing thereof I shall make to cease." (Isaiah 21:2).

We are in possession of the divine assurance that Israel is indestructible and imperishable, and will always continue to be a pre-eminent community. As it is impossible for God to cease to exist, so is Israel's destruction and disappearance from the world unthinkable, as we read, "For I the Lord change not, and ye,

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[3] Cf. Gen. R. XVI.4 ed. Theodor-Albeck, p. 16 and parallels, *Literaturblatt des Orients*, 1871, p. 18, Dukes, *Blumenlese*, p. 153, no. 259, Chajes, *Mebo Ha-Midrash* printed in the Vilna edition of Midrash Rabbah and *Ha-Maggid* XXIII, p. 335.

O sons of Jacob, will not be consumed." (Malachi 3:6). Similarly He has avowed and assured us that it is unimaginable that He will reject us entirely even if we disobey Him, and disregard His behests, as the prophet Jeremiah avers, "Thus saith the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, Then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:36). Indeed this very promise has already been given before through Moses our Teacher who says, "And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God." (Leviticus 26:44).

Put your trust in the true promises of Scripture, brethren, and be not dismayed at the series of persecutions or the enemy's ascendency over us, or the weakness of our people. These trials are designed to test and purify us so that only the saints and the pious ones of the pure and undefiled lineage of Jacob will adhere to our religion and remain within the fold, as it is written, "And among the remnant are those whom the Lord shall call." (Joel 3:5). This verse makes it clear that they are not numerous, being the descendants of those who were present on Mount Sinai,[4] witnessed the divine Revelation, entered into the covenant of God, and undertook to do and obey as is signified in their saying, "we will do, and obey." (Exodus 24:7). They obligated not only themselves but also their descendants, as it is written, "to us and to our children forever." (Deuteronomy 29:28). We have been given adequate divine assurance that not only did all the persons who were present at the Sinaitic Revelation believe in the prophecy of Moses and in his Law, but that their descendants likewise would do so, until the end of time, as it is written, "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee forever." (Exodus 10:9).

Consequently it is manifest that he who spurns the religion that was revealed at that theophany, is not an offspring of the folk who witnessed it. For our sages of blessed memory have insisted that they who entertain scruples concerning the divine message are not scions of the race that were present on Mount Sinai. (Nedarim 20a). May God guard us and you from doubt, and banish from our midst confusion, suspicion, which lead to it.

Now, my co-religionists in the Diaspora, it behooves you to hearten one another, the elders to guide the youth, and the leaders to direct the masses. Give your assent to the Truth that is immutable and unchangeable, and to the following postulates of a religion that shall never fail. God is one in a unique sense of the term, and Moses is His prophet and spokesman, and the greatest and most perfect of the seers. To him was vouchsafed by God what has never been vouchsafed to any prophet before him, nor will it be in the future. The entire Torah was divinely revealed to Moses of whom it was said, "with him do I speak mouth to mouth." (Numbers 12:8). It will neither be abrogated nor superseded, neither supplemented nor abridged. Never shall it be supplanted by another divine revelation containing positive and negative duties Keep well in mind the Revelation on Sinai in accordance with the divine precept to perpetuate the memory of this occasion and not to allow it to fall into oblivion. Furthermore we were enjoined to impress this event upon the minds of our children, as it is written, "Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but make them known unto thy children and thy children's children." (Deuteronomy 4:9).

It is imperative, my fellow Jews, that you make this great spectacle of the Revelation appeal to the imagination of your children. Proclaim at public gatherings its momentousness. For this event is the pivot of our religion, and the proof which demonstrates its veracity. Evaluate this phenomenon at its true importance for Scripture has pointed out its significance in the verse, "For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?" (Deuteronomy 4:32).

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[4] The phrase מעמד הר סיני occurs already in the Hebrew translation of Saadia's *Emunot we-Deot*, ch. VIII. ed. Bialystok, p. 167. In the Arabic text it is partly Hebrew and Arabic موقف הר סיני cf. ed. Landauer, p. 231. The phrase יום מעמד הר סיני is found in a poem by Abraham ben Halfon, printed in ציונים קובץ לזכרונו של שמחוני, Berlin, 1929, p. 71. Ibn Adret has a responsum on מעמד הר סיני, cf. his Responsa vol. IV, no. 234 and Edelman, דברי חפץ, London 1853 and *J.Q.R.* VIII, 217–237. Albo uses the phrase מעמד ששים רבוא cf. *Ikkarim* III. ed. Husik, pp. 180, 189. In the Talmud and the Midrash the phrase עמדו על הר סיני is met with frequently, cf. e. g. Shab. 146a, Ned. 20a, B. B. 120a, Num. R. VII.4, Cant. R. I.4 and *Seder Eliayahu Rabbah*, ed. Friedmann, p. 101. In Ber. 32b, the rabbis refer to the Revelation as מעשה סיני.

Remember, my co-religionists, that this great, incomparable and unique historical event, is attested by the best of evidence. For never before or since, has a whole nation witnessed a revelation from God or beheld His splendor. The purpose of all this was to confirm us in the faith so that nothing can change it, and to reach a degree of certainty which will sustain us in these trying times of fierce persecution and absolute tyranny, as it is written, "for God is come to test you." (Exodus 20:17). Scripture means that God revealed Himself to you thus in order to give you strength to withstand all future trials. Now do not slip nor err, be steadfast in your religion and persevere in your faith and its duties.

Solomon, of blessed memory, has compared our people to a beautiful woman with a perfect figure, marred by no defect, in the verse, "Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee." (Song of Songs 4:7). On the other hand, he depicted the adherents of other religions and faiths, who strive to entice and win us over to their convictions, as courtesans who lure virtuous women for lewd purposes. Similarly they seek devices to trap us into embracing their religions, and subscribing to their doctrines. To these who endeavor to decoy her into avowing the superiority of their creed, our nation deftly replies, "Why do you take hold of me, can you confer upon me something like the felicity of the two companies?" She reasons thus, "If you can furnish us with something like the Revelation on Sinai, in which the camp of Israel faced the camp of the Divine Presence, then we shall espouse your doctrines." This is metaphorically expressed in the verse, "Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will you see in the Shulammite? As it were a dance of two companies." (Song of Songs 7:1). Now "Shulammite" signifies the perfect one; "A dance of the two companies" alludes to the joy of the theophany in Mt. Sinai in which both the camp of Israel and the camp of God showed as is intimated in the two following verses: "Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God," (Exodus 19:17), and "The chariots of God are myriads, even thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in holiness." (Psalms 68:18).

Note well the apt imagery and the deeper significance of the aforementioned verse. The fourfold occurence of the word "return" is an allusion to the four empires, each of which will endeavor to coerce us to abandon our faith and embrace theirs. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that we are now living under the aegis of the Fourth Empire. A prediction to this effect is found in the Torah, that our enemies will force us to accept their faith, for we read, "And there shall ye serve god, the work of men's hands," (Deuteronomy 4:28). However, it will not be general throughout the world and God will never deprive us of His Law. As he assured us saying: For it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of his seed. Indeed, Isaiah, the herald of the national redemption, has already stated that Israel's indestructibility is the result of a Divine pact betokened by the perpetuation of the Torah in our midst, and our devotion to its tenets and teachings, as he says, "And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." (Isaiah 59:21).

Our nation speaks with pride of the virulent oppression it has suffered, and the sore tribulations it has endured, to quote the words of the Psalmist, "Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day." (44:23). The rabbis, of blessed memory, in Midrash Hazita, remark that the verse "nay, but for Thy sake" allude to the generation that undergoes persecution. (Midrash Song of Songs I:3, ed. Vilna, f. 13a). Let those persons exult who suffered dire misfortunes, were deprived of their riches, forced into exile and lost their belongings. For the bearing of these hardships is a source of glory and a great achievement in the sight of God. Whoever is visited by these calamities is like a burnt offering upon the altar. We may apply in commendation the verse to them, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that he may also bestow upon you a blessing this day." (Exodus 32:29).

It behooves the victim for the sake of his religion to escape and flee to the desert and wilderness, and not to consider separation from family or loss of wealth. For they are a slight sacrifice and a paltry offering due to God, King of kings, possessor of all things, the Lord thy God, whose Name is glorious and awful. God may be trusted to compensate you well in this world and in the world to come.

We have noted that godly and pious folk who are animated by a desire to get acquainted with the truth and those who are engaged in its pursuit, rush to the divine religion and, wend their way from the most distant parts, to the homes of scholars. They seek to gain increased insight into the law with the concomitant hope that God will amply reward them. How much more is it one's duty to go into exile, if the question of observing the whole Torah is at stake.

When a man finds it arduous to gain a livelihood in one country he emigrates to another. All the more is it incumbent upon a Jew who is restricted in the practice of his religion, to depart for another place. If he finds it impossible to leave that locality for the time being, he must not become careless and indulge with abandon in the desecration of the Sabbath and the dietary laws on the assumption that he is exempt from all religious obligations. It is the eternally inescapable duty, willy-nilly, of every one belonging to the stock of Jacob to abide by the Law. Nay, he exposes himself to punishment for the violation of each and every positive or negative precept. Let no man conclude that he may freely disregard the less important ceremonies without liability to penalty because he has committed under duress some major sins. For Jeroboam, son of Nebat, may his bones be ground to dust, was chastised not only for the sin of worshipping the calves and inciting Israel to do the same, but also for his failure to construct a booth on the Feast of Tabernacles. This is one of the fundamental principles of our religion. Understand it aright, teach it, and apply the principle widely.

In your letter you mention that the apostle has spurred on a number of people to believe that several verses in Scripture allude to the Madman, such as "bimeod meod"[5] (Genesis 17:20), "he shined forth from Mount Paran"[6] (Deuteronomy 33:1), "a prophet from the midst of thee" (Deuteronomy 18:15), and the promise to Ishmael "I will make him a great nation" (Genesis 17:20). These arguments have been rehearsed so often that they have become nauseating. It is not enough to declare that they are altogether feeble; nay, to cite as proofs these verses is ridiculous and absurd in the extreme. For these are not matters that can confuse the minds of anyone. Neither the untutored multitude nor the apostates themselves who delude others with them, believe in them or entertain any illusions about them. Their purpose in citing these verses is to win favor in the eyes of the Gentiles by demonstrating that they believe the statement of the Koran that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah. But the Muslims themselves put no faith in their arguments, they neither accept nor cite them, because they are manifestly so fallacious. Inasmuch as the Muslims could not find a single proof in the entire Bible nor a reference or possible allusion to their prophet which they could utilize, they were compelled to accuse us saying, "You have altered the text of the Torah, and expunged every trace of the name of Mohammed therefrom." They could find nothing stronger than this ignominious argument the falsity of which is easily demonstrated to one and all by the following facts. First, Scripture was translated into Syriac, Greek, Persian and Latin hundreds of years before the appearance of Mohammed. Secondly, there is a uniform tradition as to the text of the Bible both in the East and the West, with the result that no differences in the text exist at all, not even in the vocalization, for they are all correct. Nor do any differences effecting the meaning exist. The motive for their accusation lies therefore, in the absence of any allusion to Mohammed in the Torah.

The phrase "a great nation" cited above does not connote a people in possession of prophecy or a Law, but merely one large in numbers just as in reference to idolaters Scripture says "nations greater and mightier than yourselves." (Deuteronomy 11:23). Similarly, the phrase "bimeod meod" simply signifies "exceedingly." Were there any allusion in the verse to Mohammed, then it would have read "and I shall bless him bimeod meod," and whoever likes to hang on to a spider's web might then discover a reference to Mohammed therein. As it is, since Scripture says "I shall increase him bimeod meod," it can only denote an extravagant increment in numbers.

There is no question that the Divine assurance to Abraham to bless his descendants, to reveal the Torah to them, and to make them the Chosen People, refers only to the offspring of Isaac. For Ishmael is mentioned as an adjunct and appendage in the blessing of Isaac, which reads "and also of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation." (Genesis 21:13). This verse suggests that Isaac holds a primary position and Ishmael a subordinate place. This point is made even more explicit in the blessing which ignores Ishmael entirely. "For in Isaac shall seed be called in thee." (Genesis 21:12). The meaning of God's promise to Abraham is that the issue of Ishmael will be vast in numbers but neither pre-eminent nor the object of divine favor, nor distinguished for the attainment of excellence. Not because of them will Abraham be famed or celebrated, but by the noted and illustrious scions of Isaac. The phrase "shall be called" simply means, shall be renowned, as it does in the verse, "Let thy name be called in them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac." (Genesis 48:16). Other verses also indicate that when God

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[5] Cf. Poznanski, *Z. f. H. B.*, XX.61.

[6] Cf. *Literaturblatt des Orients*, VII. 173.

promised Abraham that His law would be vouchsafed to his children as is implied in the words "And I will be their God" (Genesis 17:8), He meant Isaac to the exclusion of Ishmael as is intimated in the declaration "But My covenant will I establish with Isaac" (Genesis 17:21), although He had already conferred His favor upon Ishmael when He said "Behold I have blessed him" (Genesis 17:20). Similarly, Isaac by bestowing the blessing of Abraham upon Jacob exclusively, debarred Esau from it, as we read in his benediction "And may He give you the blessing of Abraham" (Genesis 28:4). To sum up, the Divine covenant made with Abraham to grant the sublime Law to his descendants referred exclusively to those who belonged to the stock of both Isaac and Jacob. Hence the prophet expresses his gratitude to God for "the covenant which He made with Abraham, and His oath unto Isaac, which He established unto Jacob for a statute, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." (Psalms 105:9, I Chronicles 16:16).

It is also to be noted that the name of the Arabian prophet which the Mahommedans believe to be mentioned in the Torah, by way of allusion, which the Jewish apostates find in the phrase "bimeod meod," is A. H. M. D. and not M. H. M. D. So it is explicitly stated in the Koran: "They find him mentioned in the Torah and the Gospels (Sura 7:156); his name is Aḥmad." But the numerical value[7] of the latter is not equal to that of the words "bimeod meod" which is supposed to contain an allusion to the prophet of Islam.

The argument from the phrase "He shined forth from Mount Paran" (Deuteronomy 33:2) is easily refutable. Shined is past tense. Had Scripture employed the future tense "he will shine forth from Mount Paran" then the impostors might have had a semblance of truth on their side. However the use of the past tense "he shined forth" demonstrates that this phrase describes an event that has taken place, namely the theophany on Sinai. When the Deity was about to reveal Himself on Sinai, the heavenly light did not descend suddenly like a thunder-bolt, but came down gently, manifesting itself gradually first from the top of one mountain, then from another, until He reached His abode on Sinai. This notion is implied in the verse "The Lord revealed Himself at Sinai, after His light had radiated to them from Seir and glimmered from Mount Paran." (Deuteronomy 33:2). Mark well, that the phrase "unto them" refers to Israel. Note also how Scripture indicates the various gradations in the intensity of the Divine Splendor. It speaks of the light that *glimmered* from Mount Paran which is further removed from Sinai, but of the light that *radiated* from Mount Seir, which is nearer to it, and finally of the revelation of the full splendor of God on Sinai which was the goal of the theophany as is related in the verse "And the glory of God abode on Mount Sinai" (Exodus 24:16), "and the Lord came from Sinai". (Deuteronomy 33:2).

Similarly, the idea that the light descended gradually from mountain to mountain is conveyed in Deborah's description of the grandeur of Israel at the Revelation on Sinai when she exclaimed "Lord when Thou didst go forth out of Seir, when Thou didst march out of the field of Edom" (Judges 5:4). Our sages, of blessed memory, tell us that God, may He be praised and exalted, charged a prophet before the time of Moses to go to the Romans and another to go to the Arabs with the purpose of presenting them the Torah, but each of them in turn spurned it. When Moses was later sent to us we signified our acceptance in the words "All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey" (Exodus 24:7). The aforementioned event happened before the Sinaitic Revelation, consequently Scripture speaks in the past tense: "He came, radiated forth, and shone," which proves that no prophecy is intended in these words.

You write in your letter, that some people were duped by the argument that Mohammed is alluded to in the verse "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren" (Deuteronomy 18:15), while others remained unconvinced because of the phrase "from the midst of thee." It is most astonishing that some folks should be deluded by such specious proof, while others were almost persuaded, were it not for the phrase "from the midst of thee." Under these circumstance it is incumbent upon you to concentrate and understand my view in the matter. Remember that it is not right to take a passage out of its context and to draw inferences from it. It is imperative to take into consideration the preceding and following statements in order to fathom the writer's meaning and purpose before making any deductions. Were it otherwise, then it would be possible to assert that Scripture has prohibited obedience to any prophet, and interdicted belief in miracles, by quoting the verse, "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet," (Deuteronomy 13:4). It could likewise be affirmed that a positive command exists requiring

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[7] The numerical value of Mohammed in Hebrew orthography is ninety-two, equals that of the Hebrew words b'meod meod; whereas that of Ahmad is only fifty-three.

us to worship idols, by citing the verse "And ye shall serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 11:16). Other illustrations could be multiplied ad libidinem. To sum up, it is wrong to interpret any given verse apart from its context.

In order to comprehend unequivocally the verse under discussion namely, "A prophet will the Lord thy God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren," it is necessary to ascertain its context. The beginning of the paragraph whence the verse is taken, contains prohibitions of the acts of soothsaying, augury, divination, astrology, sorcery, incantation and the like. The Gentiles believe that through these practices they can predict the future course of events and take the necessary precautions to forestall them. The interdiction of these occult proceedings were accompanied with the explanation that the Gentiles believe they can depend upon them to determine future happenings. But you may not do so. You will learn about the time to come from a prophet who will rise up among you, whose predictions will come true without fail. You will thus arrive at a foreknowledge of circumstances without being obliged to resort to augury, divination, astrology and the like, for he will spare you that. Matters will be facilitated for you by the fact that this prophet will live within your borders. You will not be compelled to go in search after him from country to country, nor to travel to distant parts, as is implied in the phrase "from the midst of thee."

Moreover, another notion is conveyed in the words "from the midst of thee from thy brethren like unto me," namely, that he will be one of you, that is, a Jew. The obvious deduction is that you shall be distinguished above all others for the sole possession of prophecy. The words "like unto me" were specifically added to indicate that only the descendants of Jacob are meant. For the phrase "of thy brethren" by itself might have been misunderstood and taken to refer also to Esau and Ishmael, since we do find Israel addressing Esau as brother, for example, in the verse, "Thus saith thy brother Israel" (Numbers 20:14). On the other hand, the words "like unto me," do not denote a prophet as great as Moses, for this interpretation is precluded by the statement "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." (Deuteronomy 34:10). The general drift of the chapter points to the correctness of our interpretation and will be confirmed by the succession of the verses, to wit "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire etc.," (Deuteronomy 18:10), "For these nations, that thou art to dispossess, hearken unto soothsayers, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do." (Verse 14). "A prophet will the Lord why God raise up unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me," (Verse 15). It is obviously clear that the prophet alluded to here will not be a person who will produce a new law, or found a new religion. He will merely enable us to dispense with diviners and astrologers, and will be available for consultation concerning anything that may befall us, just as the Gentiles confer with soothsayers and prognosticators. Thus we find Saul advising with Samuel concerning his lost asses, as we read, "Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he said: 'Come and let us go to the seer'; for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer." (Samuel 9:9).

Our disbelief in the prophecy of Omar and Zeid[8] is not due to the fact that they are non-Jews, as the unlettered folk imagine, and in consequence of which they are compelled to justify their standpoint by the Biblical statement "from thy midst, out of thy brethren." For Job, Zophar, Bildad, Eliphaz, and Elihu are all considered prophets and are non-Jews. On the other hand, although Hananiah, the son of Azur was a Jew, he was deemed an accursed and false prophet. Whether one should yield credence to a prophet or not depends upon the nature of his doctrines, and not upon his race, as we shall explain presently. Our ancestors have witnessed Moses, our Teacher, foremost among the prophets, holding a colloquy with the Divinity, reposed implicit faith in him when they said to him, "Go thou near and hear," (Deuteronomy 5:24). Now he assured us that no other law remained in heaven that would subsequently be revealed, nor would there even be another Divine dispensation, as the verse, "It is not in heaven," (Deuteronomy 30:12) implies. Scripture prohibits us from making any amendments to the Law or eliminating anything, for we read "Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 13:1). We pledged and obligated ourselves to God to abide by His Law, we, our children, and our children's children, until the end of time as Scripture says "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever." (Deuteronomy 29:28). Any prophet, therefore, no matter what his pedigree is, be he priest, Levite, or Amalekite, is perfidious even if he asserts that only one of the precepts of the Torah is void, in

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[8] Cf. Chajes, *Torat Ha-Nebiim*, ch. XI, p. 26b, note.

view of the Mosaic pronouncement "unto us and unto our children forever." Such a one we would declare a false prophet and would execute him if we had jurisdiction over him. We would take no notice of the miracles that he might perform, just as we would disregard the wonder-working of one who seeks to lure people to idolatry, as we are enjoined in the verse "And the sign or wonder came to pass . . . thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet" (Deuteronomy 13:3). Since Moses, of blessed memory, has prohibited image worship for all the time, we know that the miracles of a would-be-seducer to idolatry are wrought by trickery and sorcery. Similarly, since Moses has taught us that the Law is eternal, we stamp definitely as a prevaricator any one who argues that it was destined to be in force for a fixed duration of time, because he contravenes Moses. Consequently we pay no attention to his assertions or supernatural performances.

Inasmuch as we do not believe in Moses because of his miracles, we are under no obligations to institute comparison between his miracles and those of others. Our everlastingly firm trust and steadfast faith in Moses is due to the fact that our forebears as well as he, had heard the Divine discourse on Sinai, as it is intimated in Scripture, "and they will also believe thee forever" (Exodus 19:9). This event is analogous to the situation of two witnesses who observed a certain act simultaneously. Each of them saw what his fellow saw and each of them is sure of the truth of the statement of his fellow, and does not require proof or demonstration, whereas other people, to whom they would report their testimony, would not be convinced without confirmation or certification. Similarly, we of the Jewish faith, are convinced of the truth of the prophecy of Moses, inasmuch as our ancestors in common with him witnessed the Divine revelation on Sinai, and not merely because of his miracles.[9] He performed all of these only as the occasion demanded and as is recorded in Scripture.

We do not give credence to the tenets of a miracle worker, in the same way we trust in the truth of Moses our Teacher, nor does any analogy exist between them. This distinction is a fundamental principle of our religion, but seems to have fallen into oblivion, and has been disregarded by our co-religionists. This thought was present in the mind of Solomon when he addressed the Gentiles in behalf of Israel, "What will you see in the Shulammite? as it were a dance of two companies." (Song of Songs 7:1). The verse means to say, "If you can produce anything like the revelation on Sinai then we shall concede some misgivings concerning Moses."

If a Jewish or Gentile prophet urges and encourages people to follow the religion of Moses without adding thereto or diminishing therefrom, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others, we demand a miracle from him. If he can perform it we recognize him and bestow upon him the honor due to a prophet, but if he fails to do so, he is put to death. We require only a miracle as his credentials, although it may be wrought by stratagem or magic, just as we accept the evidence of witnesses although there is a possibility of perjury. For we are divinely commanded through Moses to render judgment in a suit at law in accordance with the testimony of two witnesses, the possibility of false swearing notwithstanding. Similarly we are enjoined to yield obedience to one who asserts that he is a prophet provided he can substantiate his claims by miracle or proofs, although there is a possibility that he is an impostor. However, if the would-be-prophet teaches tenets that negate the doctrines of Moses, then we must repudiate him. This point was made abundantly clear in the introduction to our large work on the commentary of the Mishnah, where you will find some useful information concerning principles which form the foundation of our religion, and the pillars of our faith.

It is incumbent upon you to know that the rule that nothing may ever be added to or diminished from the Laws of Moses, applies equally to the oral law, that is the traditional interpretation transmitted through the sages of blessed memory. Be cautious and on your guard lest any of the heretics, may they speedily perish! mingle among you, for they are worse than apostates. For although this country is, as you know, a place of scholars, students and schools, they indulge in bombastic talk and we warn our people against their occasional errors, heresies and mistakes. As for you, in this distant country, although you are scholars, learned in the law, and pious, you are few in number, may God increase your number and hasten the time of gathering you all together. If any of the heretics rises up to corrupt the people, they will undermine the faith of the young folks and they will not find a savior. Beware of them and know that it is permitted to slay them in our opinion for they repudiate the statement in the prophecy of Moses who commanded us

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[9] Cf. Maimonides, *Hilkot Yesode ha-Torah* VIII.3.

to act "According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee thou shalt do." (Deuteronomy 17:11). They assert in wicked defiance that they believe most firmly in the prophecy of Moses, as the Arabs and Byzantines say, yet they destroy and nullify his law and kill the adherents thereof. Whoever joins them is just like his seducer. We deemed it imperative to call your attention to these facts, and to raise the young generation on these tenets, because they are a pillar of faith!

In your letter you have adverted to the computations of the date of the Redemption and R. Saadia's opinion on the subject. First of all, it devolves upon you to know that no human being will ever be able to determine it precisely as Daniel has already intimated, "For the words are shut up and sealed." (Daniel 12:9). Indeed many hypotheses were advanced by scholars, who fancied that they have discovered the date, as was anticipated in Scripture, "Many will run to and fro, and opinions shall be increased." (Daniel 12:9). That is, there shall be numerous views concerning it. Furthermore we have a Divine communication through the medium of the prophets that many persons will calculate the time of the advent of the Messiah but will fail to ascertain its true date. We are cautioned against giving way to doubt and distrust because of these miscalculations. The longer the delay, the more fervently shall you hope, as it is written, "And it declareth of the end and doth not lie, though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay." (Habakkuk 2:3).

Remember that even the date of the termination of the Egyptian Exile was not precisely known and gave rise to differences of opinion, although its duration was fixed in Scripture, where we read, "and they shall serve them and afflict them four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13). Some reckoned the period of four hundred years from the time of Jacob's arrival in Egypt, others dated it from the beginning of Israel's bondage, which happened seventy years later, while still others computed it from the time of the Covenant of the Pieces when this matter was Divinely predicted to Abraham. At the expiration of four hundred years after this event, and thirty years before the appearance of Moses, a band of Israelites left Egypt because they believed that exile had ended for them. They were subdued and slain by the Egyptians. The lot of the Israelites who remained was consequently aggravated as we learn from our sages, the teachers of our national traditions. David already alluded to the vanquished Israelites who miscalculated the date of the redemption in the verse, "The children of Ephraim were as archers handling the bow that turned back in the day of battle" (Psalms 78:9).

In truth, the period of four hundred years commences with the birth of Isaac the seed of Abraham, par excellence, as may be gathered from the verse, "For in Isaac shall seed be called to thee" (Genesis 21:12), and the verse, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, they shall serve them, and afflict them four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13). In exile, they would rule, enslave and maltreat them, this is the implication of this text. The four hundred years mentioned in this verse refer to the duration of the exile, and not [solely] to the Egyptian bondage. This fact was misunderstood until the great prophet (Moses) came, when it was realized that the four hundred years dates back precisely to the birth of Isaac. Now, if so much uncertainty prevailed in regard to the date of the emancipation from the Egyptian bondage, the term of which was fixed, how much more would it be the case in respect to the date of the final redemption, the prolonged and protracted duration of which appalled and dismayed our inspired seers, so that one of them was moved to exclaim, "Wilt Thou be angry with us forever? Wilt Thou draw out Thine anger to all generations?" (Psalms 85:6). Isaiah, too, alluding to the long drawn out exile, declared: "And they shall be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the dungeon, and shall be shut up in prison, and after many days shall they be released" (24:22). Inasmuch as Daniel has proclaimed the matter a deep secret, our sages have interdicted the calculation of the time of the future redemption, or the reckoning of the period of the advent of the Messiah, because the masses might be mystified and bewildered should the Messiah fail to appear as forecast. The rabbis invoked God to frustrate and destroy those who seek to determine precisely the advent of the Messianic era, because they are a stumbling block to the people, and that is why they uttered the imprecation "May the calculators of the final redemption come to grief" (Sanhedrin 97b).

As for R. Saadia's Messianic calculations, there are extenuating circumstances for them though he knew they were disallowed. For the Jews of his time were perplexed and misguided. The Divine religion might well nigh have disappeared had he not encouraged the pusillanimous, and diffused, disseminated and propagated by word of mouth and pen a knowledge of its underlying principles. He believed, in all earnestness, that by means of the Messianic calculations, he would inspire the masses with hope for the truth. Verily all

his deeds were for the sake of heaven. Consequently, in view of the probity of his motives, which we have disclosed, one must not decry him for his Messianic computations.

I note that you are inclined to believe in astrology[10] and in the influence of the past and future conjunctions of the planets upon human affairs. You should dismiss such notions from your thoughts. Cleanse your mind as one cleanses dirty clothes.[11] Accomplished scholars whether they are religious or not, refuse to believe in the truth of this science. Its postulates can be refuted by real proofs on national grounds. But this is not the place to enter into a discussion of them. Mark well, however, what Scripture has to say about the astrologers. At the time when Moses rose to leadership the astrologers had unanimously predicted that our nation would never be freed from bondage, nor gain their independence, but fortune smiled upon Israel, for the most exquisite of human beings appeared and redeemed them at the very time which was supposedly most inauspicious for them. Furthermore, Egypt was smitten with the plagues at the very time for which the astrologers foretold an epoch of wholesome climate, abundance, and prosperity for its inhabitants. To the failure of their vaticination, Isaiah alludes when he says "Where are they then thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the Lord of Hosts hath purposed concerning Egypt. (Isa. 19:12).

Similarly the pundits, astrologers, and prognosticators were all of one mind that the administration of Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked, marked the beginning of an era of enduring prosperity. Forsooth, his dynasty was extinguished and destroyed, as was divinely forecast by Isaiah. He derided them for pretending to fore-knowledge, and held up to scorn the state which fancied itself in possession of sapient folk versed in futurity, as we read "Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee" (47:13).

They are likewise wrong in their predictions concerning the era of the Messiah, may he speedily come. For while the Gentiles believe that our nation will never constitute an independent state, nor will they even rise above their present condition, and all the astrologers, diviners, and augurs concur in this opinion, God will prove false their views and beliefs, and will order the advent of the Messiah. Again it is Isaiah who makes reference to this event in the verse: "That frustrate the tokens of the impostors, and maketh the diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish, that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers, that saith of Jerusalem, "She shall be inhabited, and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built, and I will raise up the waste places thereof." (44:25–26). This is the correct view that every Israelite should hold, without paying any attention to the conjunctions of the stars, of greater or smaller magnitude.

I have observed your statement, that science is little cultivated, and that learning does not flourish, in your country, which you attribute to the influence of the conjunctions in the earthly trigon.[12] Remember that this low state of learning and science is not peculiar to your country, but is widely prevalent in Israel today. Indeed, a Divine premonition of such a state of affairs is contained in a verse in Isaiah which reads, "Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work, and a wonder, and the wisdom of the wise men shall perish, and the prudence of the prudent men shall be hid." (29:14).

This condition is not due to the earthly or fiery trigon, as is proven by the fact that Solomon, King of Israel, lived during the earthly trigon, and yet Scripture testifies that "he was wiser than all men." (I Kings 5:11). So did Abraham of blessed memory, who was designated the Pillar of the World, discover the First Cause of the entire universe, and demonstrated the central importance of the principle of the Unity of God for all mankind. He, Isaac and Jacob, all three of them, carry the throne of glory in their hearts, to make use of a rabbinical metaphor "The patriarchs are the chariots," (Genesis Rabbah 82:7), which in turn was suggested by the verse, "And God rose up over him." (Genesis 35:13). The meaning is that they have attained a true conception of the Deity. Now the three patriarchs lived during the earthly trigon.

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[10] Cf. S. Thein, *Der Talmud oder das Prinzip des planetarischen Einflusses*, 2nd edition, Vienna, 1876, p. 89 ff., Eugene de Faye, *Gnostiques et Gnosticisme*, Paris 1925, p. 281, note 2, Boll, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung*, Leipzig 1926 and Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans*, New York 1912.

[11] Maimonides in a parenthetical remark rebukes in a veiled and mild manner a number of scholars in Egypt who seem to have taken too lax an attitude towards a group of radicals who repudiated the oral law.

[12] The signs of the Zodiac were divided into four groups of three, called trigons, and were named after the four elements. The airy trigon includes Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius; the earthly trigon, Taurus, Virgo, and Capricornis; the fiery trigon, Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, and the watery trigon, Cancer, Scipio, and Pisces. cf. Nallino, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s. v. Astrology, p. 495.

This matter will become clear if the following facts are borne in mind. There is first, the smaller conjunction, that is, the meeting of Saturn with Jupiter, which occurs once in approximately twenty solar years. These conjunctions continue to take place twelve times within the same trigon, covering a period of two hundred and forty years. Then conjunctions take place in the second trigon, which occur every two hundred and forty solar years. The shift to the next trigon is known as the medium conjunction. According to this calculation an interval of nine hundred and sixty years will elapse between the first and second meeting of two planets in the same point of the Zodiac.[13] This is termed the great conjunction, and occurs once in nine hundred and sixty years. This is the time that must elapse between the first and second meeting of Saturn and Jupiter in the same degree of Aries. If you will calculate back, you will understand my statement above that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as David lived during the earthly trigon. My purpose in going into details was to dispel any suspicion of yours that the trigon exercises any influence upon human affairs.

Furthermore you write that some people have calculated the forthcoming conjunction and have determined that all the seven planets will meet in one of the constellations of the Zodiac. This forecast is untrue, for no meeting of the seven planets will occur in the next conjunction, nor in the following ones. For such an event will not happen even in ten thousand years, as is well known to those who are familiar with the astronomical law of equation. Verily this is the calculation of an ignorant person, as is evinced by other remarks of his, quoted by you, to the effect that there will be a deluge of air and of dust. It is essential for you to know that these and similar assertions are fabricated and mendacious. Do not consider a statement true because you find it in a book, for the prevaricator is as little restrained with his pen as with his tongue. For the untutored and uninstructed are convinced of the veracity of a statement by the mere fact that it is written; nevertheless its accuracy must be demonstrated in another manner.

Remember that a blind person submits to an individual having power of sight for intelligent direction knowing that he lacks the vision to guide him safely; and an ailing person, unskilled in the art of medicine, and uninformed as to matters detrimental to or beneficial for his health, defers to a physician for guidance and obeys him implicitly. Just so is it indispensable for the laity to yield unswervingly to the prophets, who were men of true insight, and to confide in them in respect to matters affecting the truth or the error of a given teaching. Next in importance are the sages who have studied day and night the dogmas and doctrines of our faith and have learned to distinguish between the genuine and the spurious.

After this exposition you may trust me that the statements you have previously quoted are inaccurate and this applies equally to similar views which you heard expressed in conversation or met with in books. For the author of such sayings is either ignorant, a mountebank, or seeks to destroy the law and to demolish its bulwarks. Do you perceive the brazenness of these people who assert that there will be a deluge of air, and dust, and fire, in order to deceive and delude others to believe that the Deluge in the time of Noah was merely due to a concentration of water, and was not a Divine punishment for the immorality of the time, as is explicitly stated in Scripture that guides us against error and fallacy. Similarly Sodom, and the other cities were not destroyed because of the unbelief and wickedness of their inhabitants in direct contradiction to the Bible which says, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come to me." (Genesis 18:21). Thus whatever happens in this world through Divine intervention, they say is the inevitable consequence of the planetary conjunctions.

They have affirmed the truth of their propositions in order to undermine the principles of our religion, and to give free reign to their animal instincts and passions as do the beasts and the ostriches. We were divinely admonished against those views in Scripture to the following effect: "If you rebel against Me so that I bring disaster upon you as a punishment for your misdeeds, but you ascribe your reverses to chance rather than to your guilt, then shall I increase your afflictions and make them more grievous." This is the intent of the verse in the Chapter of Admonition, If you will walk with me 'bekeri' I shall walk with you in the wrath of 'keri' " (Leviticus 26:21, 24). Now "keri" signifies chance, hazard. Scriptures means to say if you regard My chastisement as a fortuitous event, then shall I bring the most severe calamities upon you "sevenfold for your sins." (Leviticus 26:24). These foregoing remarks have made it abundantly clear that the advent of the Messiah is in no way subject to the influence of the stars.

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[13] Since there are four trigons it would take four times two hundred and forty or nine hundred and sixty years for the planets to transverse the whole Zodiac.

Indeed one of our keen minds in the province of Andalusia, calculated by means of astrology the date of the final redemption and predicted the coming of the Messiah in a particular year. Every one of our distinguished scholars made little of his declaration, discounted what he did and censured him sharply for it. But grim fate dealt with him more sternly than we could have. For at the very time when the Messiah was supposed to arrive, a rebel leader appeared in Maghreb who issued an order of conversion as you are well aware. The event proved to be a great debacle for the partisans of this prognosticator. Indeed the hardships experienced by our people in the diaspora are responsible for these extravagances, for a drowning man catches at a straw.

Therefore, my co-religionists, "be strong and let your heart take courage, all you that wait for the Lord." (Psalms 31:25). Strengthen one another, affirm your faith in the Expected One, may he speedily appear in your midst. "Strengthen ye the weak hands and make firm the tottering knees." (Isaiah 35:3). Remember! Isaiah, the herald of Israel's redemption predicted that the prolongation of the adversities of exile will impel many of our people to believe that God has relinquished and abandoned us (far be it from Him), as we read "But Zion said: 'the Lord hath forsaken me, And the Lord hath forgotten me'." (49:14). But he was given the Divine assurance that such is not the case, to quote the following, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, these may forget, yet I will not forget thee." (49:15). In truth, this Divine promise had already been divulged by the First Prophet, who declared: "For the Lord thy God is a merciful God. He will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them." (Deuteronomy 4:31). "Then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion on thee, and will return and gather thee from all the peoples whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee." (Deuteronomy 30:3).

It is, my co-religionists, one of the fundamental articles of the faith of Israel, that the future redeemer of our people will spring only from the stock of Solomon son of David.[14] He will gather our nation, assemble our exiles, redeem us from our degradation, propagate the true religion, and exterminate his opponents as is clearly stated in Scripture "I see him but not now, I behold him but not nigh, there shall step forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall arise out of Israel. And shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also, even his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel doeth valiantly." (Numbers 24:17–18). He will be sent by God at a time of great catastrophe and dire misfortune for Israel as was predicted in the verse "There will be none remaining, shut up or left at large" (Deuteronomy 32.36). And when he appears, he will fulfill the promises made in his behalf. A later prophet too was alluding to the Messianic tribulations when he declared "But who can endure the day of his coming" (Malachi 3:2). This is the proper understanding of this article of faith.

From the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah and the statement of our sages it is clear that the advent of the Messiah will take place some time subsequent to the universal expansion of the Roman empire and Arabic rule, which is an actuality today. This fact is true beyond question or doubt. Daniel in the latter part of his vision alludes to the Kingdom of the Arabs, to the rise of Mohammed and then to the arrival of the Messiah. Similarly Isaiah intimated that the coming of the Messiah will occur after the rise of the Madman, in the verse "A man riding on an ass, a man riding on a camel, and two men riding on horses." (21:7). Now "the man riding on an ass" is a symbolical reference to the Messiah as is evident from another verse which describes him as "lowly and riding on an ass' (Zechariah 9:9). He will follow the "man riding on the camel" that is, the Arabic kingdom. The statement "two men riding on horses" refers to both empires, the Roman and the Arabian. A similar interpretation of Daniel's vision concerning the image and the beasts is correct beyond doubt. They are conclusions derived from the plain meaning of the text.

The precise date of the messianic advent cannot be known. But I am in possession of an extraordinary tradition which I received from my father, who in turn received it from his father, going back to our early ancestors who were exiled from Jerusalem, and who were mentioned by the prophet in the verse, "And the exiles of Jerusalem that are in Spain" (Obadiah 20). According to this tradition there is a covert indication in the prediction of Balaam to the future restoration of prophecy in Israel. Incidentally it may be stated that there are other verses in the Torah which contain cryptic allusions in addition to their simple meaning. For example, the word "r'du" in the remark of Jacob to his sons, "r'du Shamah," "Get you down thither" (Genesis 42:2), has the numerical value of 210, and contains a hint to the length of Israel's stay in

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[14] Cf. *Ha-Mizrah*, vol. I, Cracow 1903, p. 542.

Egypt. Likewise, the statement of Moses our Teacher, "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children and ye shall have been long in the land," (Deuteronomy 4:25), embodies a reference to the duration of Israel's stay in Palestine, from the date of their arrival to the exile in the time of Jehoiakim, which was eight hundred and forty years, corresponding to the numerical value of the word We*No*S*H*a*NT*e*M*. Similarly, many other verses could be cited.

To come back to Balaam's prophecy, the verse "After the lapse of time, one will tell Jacob and Israel what God hath wrought," (Numbers 23:23), contains a veiled allusion to the date of the restoration of prophecy to Israel. The statement means that after the lapse of an interval equal to the time that passed from the Six Days of Creation to Balaam's day, seers will again tell Israel what God hath wrought. Now Balaam uttered his prediction in the thirty-eighth year after the Exodus which corresponds to the year 2485 after the Creation of the World, for the Exodus took place in the beginning of the year 2448. According to the interpretation of this chronology, prophecy would be restored to Israel in the year 4970[15] after the creation of the world. It is doubtless true that the reappearance of prophecy in Israel is one of the signs betokening the approach of the Messianic era as is intimated in Scripture "And your sons and your daughters shall prophecy . . . And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth . . . Before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 3:1, 3, 4). This is the most genuine tradition concerning the Messianic advent. We were admonished against, and strictly prohibited from blazening it abroad, lest some folk deem it unduly postponed. We have already apprised you concerning it, but God knows best what is true.

Your statement that Jeremiah alludes to the advent of the Messiah in the verse "It is a time of trouble unto Jacob" (30:7) is incorrect, for it needs must refer to the war of Gog and Magog which will take place some time after the arrival of the Messiah. Neither the fall of Giron Gate[16] nor similar omens portent the oncoming of the Messiah. Some of the supposed prophetic signs are mistakenly ascribed to the sages, while others owe their origin to figures of speech and enigmatic sayings of the rabbis, which should not be taken literally.

You mention that a certain man in one of the cities of Yemen pretends that he is the Messiah.[17] As I live, I am not surprised at him or at his followers, for I have no doubt that he is mad and a sick person should not be rebuked or reproved for an illness brought on by no fault of his own. Neither am I surprised at his votaries, for they were persuaded by him because of their sorry plight, their ignorance of the importance and high rank of the Messiah, and their mistaken comparison of the Messiah with the son of the Mahdi [the belief in] whose rise they are witnessing. But I am astonished that you, a scholar who has studied carefully the doctrines of the rabbis, are inclined to repose faith in him. Do you not know, my brother, that the Messiah is a very eminent prophet, more illustrious than all the prophets after Moses? Do you not know that a false pretender to prophecy is liable to capital punishment, for having arrogated to himself unwarranted distinction, just as the person who prophesies in the name of idols is put to death, as we read in Scripture "But the prophet that shall speak a word presumptuously in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die." (Deuteronomy 18:20). What better evidence is there of his mendacity, than his very pretensions to be the Messiah.

How odd is your remark about this man, that he is renowned for his meekness and a little wisdom, as if these were indeed the attributes of the Messiah. Do these characteristics make him a Messiah? You were beguiled by him because you have not considered the pre-eminence of the Messiah, the manner and place of his appearance, and the marks whereby he is to be identified. The Messiah, indeed, ranks after Moses in eminence and distinction, and God has bestowed some gifts upon him which he did not bestow upon Moses, as may be gathered from the following verses: "His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:3). "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." (11:2). "And Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins." (11:5). Six appellations were divinely conferred upon him as the following passage indicates: "For a child is born unto us, and a son is given unto us, and the government is upon his shoulder, and he is called Pele, Yoetz, El, Gibbor, Abiad, Sar-Shalom." (Isaiah 9:5). And another verse alluding to the

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[15] That is, 1210 C. E.

[16] A famous gate of Damascus, cf. Brüll, *Jahrbücher*, II, 1876, pp. 197–198.

[17] For a letter on the Imprisonment and Execution of a Pseudo-Messiah in Yemen, see M. S. Adler 4011, *Catalogue*, p. 153.

Messiah culminates in the following manner "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." (Psalms 2:7). All these statements demonstrate the pre-eminence of the Messiah.

Transcendent wisdom is a sine qua non for inspiration. It is an article of our faith that the gift of prophecy is vouchsafed only to the wise, the strong, and the rich. Strong is defined as the ability to control one's passions. Rich signifies wealthy in knowledge. Now if we dare not put trust in a man's pretensions to prophecy, if he does not excel in wisdom, how much less must we take seriously the claims of an ignoramus to be the Messiah. That the man in question is a sciolist is evident from the order he issued, as you state, to the people to give away all their possessions for eleemosynary purposes. They did right in disobeying him, and he was wrong inasmuch as he disregarded the Jewish law concerning alms-giving. For Scripture says, "If a man will devote anything of all that he has" and the rabbis explain in their comment on this verse, "part of all that he has, but not all that he has," (Sifra ad locum). The sages accordingly set bounds to the bounty of the beneficent in an explicit statement which reads "He who is inclined to be liberal with the poor, may not part with more than a fifth of his possessions. (Ketubot 50a). There is no doubt that the process of reasoning which led him to claim that he is the Messiah, induced him to issue a command to his fellow-men to give away their property and distribute it to the poor. But then the affluent would become destitute and vice-versa. According to his ordinance, it would be necessary for the nouveaux riches to return their recently-acquired property to the newly impoverished. Such a regulation, which would keep property moving in a circle, is the acme of folly.

As to the place where the Messiah will make his first appearance, Scripture intimates that he will first present himself only in the Land of Israel, as we read, "He will suddenly appear in His Temple" (Malachi 3:1). As for the advent of the Messiah, nothing at all will be known about it before it occurs. The Messiah is not a person concerning whom it may be predicted that he will be the son of so and so, or of the family of so and so. On the contrary he will be unknown before his coming, but he will prove by means of miracles and wonders that he is the true Messiah. Scripture in allusion to his mysterious lineage says, "His name is the Shoot, and he will shoot up out of his place" (Zechariah 6:12). Similarly, Isaiah referring to the arrival of the Messiah implies that neither his father nor mother, nor his kith nor kin will be known, "For he will shoot up right forth as a sapling, and as a root out of the dry ground." (53:2). After his manifestation in Palestine, Israel will be gathered in Jerusalem and the other cities of Palestine. Then will the tidings spread to the East and the West until it will reach you in Yemen and those beyond you in India as we learn from Isaiah. "That sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, go, ye swift mesengers, to a nation that has been pulled and plucked to a people that suffered terribly from their beginning onward." (18:2). The process of the final redemption will not be reversed so that it will first appear in distant lands, and ultimately reach Palestine.

What the great powers are, which all the prophets from Moses to Malachi ascribe to the Messiah, may be inferred from various statements in the twenty-four books of Scripture. The most significant of them all is the fact that the mere report of his advent will strike terror into the hearts of all the kings of the earth, and their kingdoms will fall, neither will they be able to war or revolt against him. They will neither defame nor calumniate him, for the miracles he will perform will frighten them into complete silence. Isaiah refers to the submission of the kings to the Messiah in the verse, "Kings shall shut their mouth because of him." (52:15). He will slay whom he will, none will escape or be saved, as it is written, "And he shall smite the land with the rod of his mouth." (Isaiah 11:4). Revolution and war in the entire world, from East to West, will not cease at the beginning of the Messianic era, but only after the wars of Gog and Magog, as was indicated by Ezekiel. I do not believe that this man who has appeared among you posesses these powers.

You know that the Christians falsely ascribe marvelous powers to Jesus the Nazarene,[18] may his bones be ground to dust, such as the resurrection of the dead and other miracles. Even if we would grant them for the sake of argument, we should not be convinced by their reasoning that Jesus is the Messiah. For we can bring a thousand proofs or so from the Scripture that it is not so even from their point of view. Indeed, will anyone arrogate this rank to himself unless he wishes to make himself a laughing stock?

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[18] Cf. Krauss, *J. E.* VII.171, *Ha-Shiloah* 45:130, G. Levi della Vida, "Gesu e il teschio (leggenda Musulmana) in Bilychnis," *Rivista mensile de Studi Religiosi*, Rome 1923, pp. 116–121 and Giustiono Boson, "La leggenda di Gesu e il re di Tiro" in *Revue de l'Orient Chretien*, XXI (1918–19) 225–240.

In sum, had this man acted presumptuously or disdainfully, I would deem him worthy of death. The truth seems to be that he became melancholy and lost his mind. In my opinion, it is most advisable, both for your good and for his that you put him in iron chains for a while, until the Gentiles learn that he is demented. After you have blazoned and bruited abroad the intelligence concerning this man among them, you may release him without endangering his safety. If the Gentiles gain knowledge about him after he has been locked up by you, they will taunt him, and pronounce him irrational and you will remain unmolested by them. If you procrastinate until they learn of this affair of their own accord, then you will most likely incur their wrath.

Remember, my co-religionists, that on account of the vast number of our sins, God has hurled us in the midst of this people, the Arabs, who have persecuted us severely, and passed baneful and discriminatory legislation against us, as Scripture has forewarned us, "Our enemies themselves shall judge us" (Deuteronomy 32:31). Never did a nation molest, degrade, debase and hate us as much as they. Therefore when David, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, envisaged the future tribulations of Israel, he bewailed and lamented their lot only in the Kingdom of Ishmael, and prayed in their behalf, for their deliverance, as is implied in the verse, "Woe is me, that I sojourn with Meschech, that I dwell beside the tents of Kedar." (Psalms 120:5). Note the distinction between Kedar and the children of Ishmael, for the Madman and imbecile is of the lineage of the children of Kedar as they readily admit. Daniel alludes only to our humiliation and degradation "like the dust in threshing" suffered at the hands of the Arabs, may they speedily be vanquished, when he says, "And some of the host and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them." (8:10). Although we were dishonored by them beyond human endurance, and had to put with their fabrications, yet we behaved like him who is depicted by the inspired writer, "But I am as a deaf man, I hear not, and I am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth." (Psalms 38:14). Similarly our sages instructed us to bear the prevarications and preposterousness of Ishmael in silence. They found a cryptic allusion for this attitude in the names of his sons "Mishma, Dumah, and Massa" (Genesis 25:14), which was interpreted to mean, "Listen, be silent, and endure." (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, ad locum). We have acquiesced, both old and young, to inure ourselves to humiliation, as Isaiah instructed us "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair." (50:6). All this notwithstanding, we do not escape this continued maltreatment which well nigh crushes us. No matter how much we suffer and elect to remain at peace with them, they stir up strife and sedition, as David predicted, "I am all peace, but when I speak, they are for war." (Psalms 120:7). If, therefore, we start trouble and claim power from them absurdly and preposterously we certainly give ourselves up to destruction.

I shall now narrate to you succinctly several episodes subsequent to the rise of the Arabic kingdom, from which you will derive some benefit.[19] One of these refers to the Exodus of a multitude of Jews, numbering hundred of thousands, from the East beyond Ispahan, led by an individual who pretended to be the Messiah. They were accoutered with military equipment, and drawn swords, and slew all those that

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[19] The following four incidents about the pseudo-Messiahs are found only in the Arabic original (in only one of the MSS.) For the translation of this text I have utilized the English rendering made by the late Professor Israel Friedlaender which he prepared in anticipation of a complete English version of the Letter which he planned to make. The following additional information concerning the activity of this pretender and his subsequent fate, is given by Maimonides in a letter written twenty-two years later to the Rabbis of Southern France.

> "In Yemen there arose a man who claimed that he was the harbinger of the Messiah, who was supposed to have arrived already in Yemen. Many people, both Jews and Arabs, followed him in his roamings in the mountains. Our co-religionists in Yemen wrote me a long letter concerning his ways, his doings, the innovations he introduced into the prayer book, and his preaching. They asserted that they witnessed such and such miracles of his, and wished to have my opinion regarding this matter. I concluded from their remarks as follows: That poor fellow was an ignorant religious fanatic without any sense at all, and that the miracles he was alleged to have palmed off upon them were a mere imposition. Inasmuch as I entertained fears concerning the Jews there, I composed rather a lengthy tract in which I dealt with the Messiah, his characteristics, and the nature of the times in which he would appear. I cautioned them to restrain that man lest he perish and the community with him. Finally after a year he was taken into custody, and his adherents fled. When the king of the Arabs requested him 'Why have you done all this?' he replied, 'Indeed, I have done these things in accordance with God's behest.' 'Can you prove that it is so?' asks the king. 'If you sever my head, I shall immediately be resurrected,' he responded. 'I do not expect any better evidence than that,' continued the king, 'and if that miracle transpires then not only I, but the whole world will acknowledge that our ancestral faith is false.' Whereupon they immediately killed that poor fellow, may his death be an atonement for him and for all Israel! As a consequence a monetary fine was imposed upon the Jews in many localities. There are still some fools who believe that he will be resurrected soon."

For the Hebrew text, see Marx, *The Correspondence between the Rabbis of Southern France and Maimonides about Astrology*, New York, 1926, pp. 50–51.

encountered them. They reached, according to the information I received, the vicinity of Bagdad. This happened in the beginning of the reign of the Umayyads.

The king then said to all the Jews of his kingdom: "Let your scholars go out to meet this multitude and ascertain whether their pretension is true and he is unmistakably your Expected One. If so, we shall conclude peace with you under any conditions you may prefer. But if it is dissimulation, then I shall wage war against them." When the sages met these Jews, the latter declared: "We belong to the children of the district beyond the River." Then they asked them: "Who instigated you to make this uprising?" Whereupon they replied: "This man here, one of the descendants of David, whom we know to be pious and virtuous. This man, whom we knew to be a leper at night, arose the following morning healthy and sound." They believed that leprosy was one of the characteristics of the Messiah, for which they found an allusion to the verse: "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," (Isaiah 53:4), that is by leprosy. Whereupon the sages explained to them that this interpretation was incorrect, and that he lacked even one of the characteristics of the Messiah, let alone all of them. Furthermore they advised them as follows: "O, brethren, you are still near your native country and have the possibility of returning thither. If you remain in this land you will not only perish, but also undermine the teachings of Moses, by misleading people to believe that the Messiah has appeared and has been vanquished, whereas you have neither a prophet in your midst, nor an omen betokening his oncoming." Thereupon they were persuaded by these arguments. The Sultan turned over to them so and so many thousand of dinars by way of hospitality in order that they should leave his country. But after they had returned home, he had a change of heart with respect to the Jews upon whom he imposed a fine for his expenditures. He ordered them to make a special mark on their garments, the writing of the word "cursed," and to attach one iron bar in the back and one in the front. Ever since then the communities of Khorasan and Ispahan experienced the tribulations of the Diaspora. This episode we have learned from oral reports.

The following incident we have verified and know to be true because it occurred in recent times. About fifty years ago or less, a pious and virtuous man and scholar by the name of Moses Al-Dar'i came from Dar'a to the province of Andalusia to study under Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi, of blessed memory, ibn Migash, of whom you very likely have heard. Later he left for Fez, the center of Maghreb. People flocked to him because of his piety, virtue and learning. He informed them that the Messiah had come, as was divinely revealed to him in a dream. Yet he did not pretend on the basis of a divine communication, as did the former lunatic, that he was the Messiah. He merely affirmed that the Messiah had appeared. Many people became his adherents and reposed faith in him. My father and master, of blessed memory, endeavored to dissuade and discourage people from following him. However only a few were influenced by my father, while most, nay, nearly all clung to R. Moses, of blessed memory. Finally he predicted events which came true no matter what was going to occur. He would say: "I was informed yesterday — this and this would happen," and it did happen exactly as he foretold. Once he forecast a vehement rain for the coming Friday and that the falling drops will be blood. This was considered a sign of the approaching advent of the Messiah,[20] as was inferred from the verse, "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke." (Joel 3:3). This episode took place in the month of Marheshvan. A very heavy rain fell that Friday and the fluid that descended was red and viscous as if it were mixed with clay. This miracle convinced all the people that he was undoubtedly a prophet. In itself this occurence is not inconsistent with the tenets of the Torah, for prophecy will return to Israel before the Messianic advent, as I have previously explained. When the majority of the people put their trust in him, he predicted that the Messiah would come that very year on Passover eve. He advised the people to sell their property and contract debts to the Muslims with the promise to pay back ten dinars for one, in order to observe the precepts of the Torah in connection with the Passover festival, for they will never see them again, and so they did. When Passover came and nothing transpired, the people were ruined as most of them had disposed of their property for a trifling sum, and were overwhelmed with debt. When the Gentiles in the vicinity and their serfs learned of this hoax they were minded to do away with him, had they located him. As this Muslim country no longer offered him protection he left for Palestine where he died, may his memory be blessed. When he left he made predictions, as I was informed by those who saw him, concerning events both great and little in Maghreb which were later fulfilled.

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[20] Cf. *R. E. J.* 58, p. 182.

My father of blessed memory, told me that about fifteen or twenty years before that episode, there lived respectable folks in Cordova, the center of Andalusia, some of whom were given to the cult of astrology. They were all of one mind that the Messiah would appear that year. They sought a revelation in a dream night after night, and ascertained that the Messiah was a man of that city. They picked a pious and virtuous person by the name of Ibn Aryeh who had been instructing the people. They wrought miracles and made predictions just as Al-Dar'i did until they won over the hearts of all the people. When the influential and learned men of our community heard of this, they assembled in the synagogue and had Ibn Aryeh brought there and had him flogged in public. Furthermore they imposed a fine upon him, and put him into the ban, because he gave assent by his silence to the professions of his adherents, instead of restraining them and pointing out to them that they contradict our religion. They did the same thing to the persons who assembled about him. The Jews escaped the wrath of the Gentiles only with the greatest difficulty.

About forty years preceding the affair of Ibn Aryeh in Andalusia, there appeared a man in Linon,[21] a large center in the heart of France, which numbered more than ten thousand Jewish families. He pretended that he was the Messiah. He was supposed to have performed the following miracle: On moonlit nights he would go out and climb to the top of high trees in the field and glide from tree to tree like a bird. He cited a verse from Daniel to prove that such a miracle was within the power of the Messiah: "And behold, there came with the clouds of heaven One like unto a son of man . . . And there was given him dominion." (7:13–14). Many who witnessed the miracle became his votaries. The French discovered this, pillaged and put many of his followers to death, together with the pretender. Some of them maintain however, that he is still in hiding until this very day.

The prophets have predicted and instructed us, as I have told you, that pretenders and simulators will appear in great numbers at the time when the advent of the true Messiah will draw nigh, but they will not be able to make good their claim. They will perish with many of their partisans.

Solomon, of blessed memory, inspired by the holy spirit, foresaw that the prolonged duration of the exile would incite some of our people to seek to terminate it before the appointed time, and as a consequence they would perish or meet with disaster. Therefore he admonished and adjured them in metaphorical language to desist, as we read, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field, that ye awaken not, nor stir up love, until it please." (Song of Songs 2:7, 8:4). Now, brethren and friends, abide by the oath, and stir not up love until it please. (Ketubot 111a).

May God, Who created the world with the attributes of mercy grant us the privilege to behold the return of the exiles, to the portion of His inheritance, to contemplate the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His Temple. May He take us out from the Valley of the Shadow of Death wherein He put us. May He remove darkness from our eyes, and gloom from our hearts. May he fulfill in our days as well as yours the prophecy contained in the verse, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light." (Isaiah 9:1). May He darken our opponents in His anger and wrath, may He illuminate our obscurity, as it is written, "For behold darkness shall cover the earth . . . but upon thee the Lord will shine." (Isaiah 60:2). Greetings unto you, my dear friend, master of the sciences, and paragon of learning, and unto our erudite colleagues, and unto all the rest of the people. Peace, peace, as the light that shines, and much peace until the moon be no more. Amen.

I beg you to send a copy of this missive to every community in the cities and hamlets, in order to strengthen the people in their faith and to put them on their feet. Read it at public gatherings and in private, and you will thus become a public benefactor. Take adequate precautions lest its contents be divulged to the Gentiles by an evil person and mishap overtake us (God spare us therefrom).[22] When I began writing this letter I had some misgivings about it, but they were overruled by my conviction that the public welfare takes precedence over one's personal safety. Moreover, I am sending it to a personage such as you, "and the secret of the Lord may be entrusted to those who fear Him." Our sages, the successors of the prophets, assured us that persons engaged in a religious mission will meet with no disaster (Pesahim 8b). What more important religious mission is there than this. Peace be unto all Israel. Amen.

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[21] Perhaps the city of Lyons is meant.

[22] Before the invention of printing, governmental censorship of "subversive" writings was limited to meting out severe punishment to the author *after* the publication of his work. Maimonides rightly feared that his attacks on Islam, if made known to the Egyptian authorities, might spell disaster for him and his family.